



## PEOPLE'S EMERGENCY CENTER

*Nurturing Families, Strengthening Neighborhoods, Driving Change.*

### **Testimony to Philadelphia Division of Housing and Community Development in support of Homelessness Prevention programs on the Consolidated Annual Performance and Evaluation Report (CAPER), February 7, 2017**

I am Joe Willard, Vice President for Policy for the People's Emergency Center (PEC). PEC's mission is to nurture families, strengthen neighborhoods, and drive change. We work with families, children and youth who experience homelessness, and in several West Philadelphia communities (Belmont, Mantua, Mill Creek, Saunders Park, and West Powelton) for community and economic development initiatives.

We have several recommendations for you. One, we urge the City to increase funding for the Basic Systems Repair Program, the Weatherization Assistance Program, and residential façade improvements.

We believe that stable homes build stable communities. As PEC's neighborhoods in West Philadelphia continue to revitalize and attract new investment, it's important that residents have access to resources that will allow them to succeed as homeowners. Through our Neighborhood Advisory Committee (NAC) PEC has received numerous requests for information on home repair assistance. In fact, these types of inquiries are often the most frequent. We encourage DHCD to request additional funding and support for PHDC's Basic Systems Repair Program and the Weatherization Program. While these programs have helped numerous homeowners over the years, we recognize the limited capacity the city has in managing these programs. Often neighbors report a wait list that extends three years or more. Increased support would allow the city to assist more homeowners and reduce this wait time significantly.

We also encourage DHCD to consider requesting additional funds for residential façade improvements. As an Elm Street community PEC has had the privilege of tapping into committed DCED funding to support a residential façade program in our service area, which over 100 homeowners have benefitted from throughout the years. We hope to continue this program into the future through the assistance of Keystone Communities funding and the support of DHCD.

Two, PEC supports what Mr. Daniel Farrell testified about homelessness prevention. PEC is actively supporting the campaign to expand homelessness prevention strategies in Philadelphia as advocated for by the Family Service Provider Network (FSPN), a network of 20 agencies.

Why would you need to consider expanding homelessness prevention?

One, there is a crisis in family homelessness in Philadelphia. As of now, there are some 900 homeless families in either emergency and transitional housing. At \$40 per day per person, a family of three would cost the City \$10,800 for staying 90 days in emergency housing. Actually, the cost is much higher because funding of emergency housing is shared by the providers, who fundraise the difference of the actual cost. Most all emergency housing contracts with the City have been frozen for 10 years (except for minimum wage increases).

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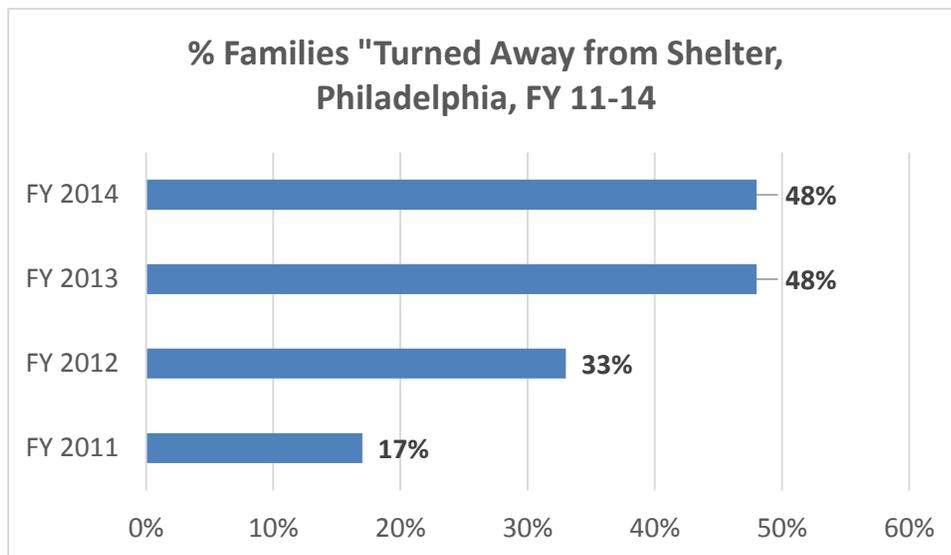
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Not all families need to come into shelter, but there are few resources other than shelter. In the next three years, it can be expected that more than 4,200 families with more than 6,000 children and youth, could access the City's emergency housing system.<sup>i</sup>

Two, the number of families who are turned away from shelter or are living doubled up are said to be in the thousands. The data on this is scattered in different data systems, and you would need to ask the City for estimates. We have been told that anywhere from 10 to 100 families who ask for emergency housing are turned away<sup>ii</sup>, depending on the week. (I am not aware of what the situation is like for persons who are homeless but are single males or females.)

At the most recent publication, 48 percent of families were turned away.



Three, there are fewer emergency and transitional housing units in the system that there was last year, according to the City's Housing Inventory Chart. This reinforces the suggestion that there are more people in need with fewer options.

Four, I want to stress the **cost of doing nothing**. Right now, more than 10 to 100 families<sup>iii</sup> (which would include more than 200 children and youth) **per week** and 40 young adults<sup>iv</sup> **per month** are turned away from emergency shelter.

This is **not new** information. The former director of the Philadelphia Office of Supportive Housing had testified to City Council since at least 2011<sup>v</sup> that OSH is turning away families and cannot handle the volume of those who seek emergency housing. In addition, please consider that:

- Children suffer trauma. They miss school and achieve lower scores on standardized tests. This leads to higher costs for remedial education. Some children end up in the child welfare system, which can cost more than \$62,000 per child per year.

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- Health risks of babies: More than 300 babies per year end up in emergency/transitional housing. They tend to have higher early intervention costs, emergency room utilization, expensive health interventions like longer stays in Neo-Intensive Care Units<sup>vi</sup>. Much of these costs could be avoided.
- Driving up funding costs for other educational, health, and human services.
- Finally, HUD is developing criteria and benchmarks<sup>vii</sup> that it will use to affect funding priorities. One of the criteria is that the community uses a prevention and diversion strategy, and “...provides immediate assistance access to low-barrier shelter.” Some of the benchmarks include **reducing** the number of people seeking emergency housing, **reducing** the number of people who return to homelessness after being helped, **reducing** emergency housing to 45 days (Philadelphia’s average may be 150 days), and more. If evaluated today, Philadelphia would not score well on these indicators. This could risk funding to the City.

Five, and final, prevention is less expensive and can be highly successful. When OHS managed its federally funded homeless prevention right after the recession, numbers of families in shelter declined. One evaluation report showed that 85 percent of those families served did not come back to seek emergency housing. Nationally, HUD evaluated its prevention programs and showed similar outcomes.

### **We recommend that you expand homelessness prevention strategies.**

It is our understanding that the trust fund money – about \$500,000 -- went to mortgage foreclosure prevention. The families who are in shelter today are nearly 100% renters, not former homeowners. This leads me to suggest that mortgage foreclosure prevention is not the same as homelessness prevention.

We specifically ask you to consider:

- Provide \$3 million that would allow the Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services to develop creative lower-cost, short term, community-based interventions to prevent families from falling into the downward spiral of homelessness while we are working towards meeting the needs for creating more housing. These interventions should be delivered in key geographical locations providing a variety of supports, including short-term rent assistance, master lease arrangements, coaching and supports for co-housing arrangements, support for responsible property managers and landlords willing to work with a struggling family, one-time utility arrearages, case management, ‘rapid rehousing,’ diversion, family reconciliation, and other stabilization services to 1,000 families a year based on OHS’s evidence about who is most likely to become homeless.

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Thank you for your consideration.

## Attachments:

- Housing Inventory Chart
- Graphic of Philadelphia's homeless system
- HUD: Criteria and Benchmarks for Achieving the Goal of Ending Family Homelessness, January 2017
- Class 200 General Fund line item in OHS's budget

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<sup>i</sup> Philadelphia Office of Supportive Services: Annual Homeless Assessment Report, 2013. Based on the last available known number of families who spend at least one night in emergency housing in Philadelphia.

<sup>ii</sup> Philadelphia Office of Supportive Housing "All Things Homeless" newsletter, October 2015

<sup>iii</sup> IBID

<sup>iv</sup> Assertion by John Ducoff, Covenant House PA to Philadelphia Continuum of Care Board meeting, 2015

<sup>v</sup> See Philadelphia Office of Supportive Housing budget testimony to City Council in 2001, 2012, 2013, 2014

<sup>vi</sup> Shaw, Sara and Joe Willard: Homeless Babies in Pennsylvania, 2016

<sup>vii</sup> United States Interagency Council on Homelessness: Criteria and Benchmarks for Achieving the Goal of Ending Family Homelessness, January 2017

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